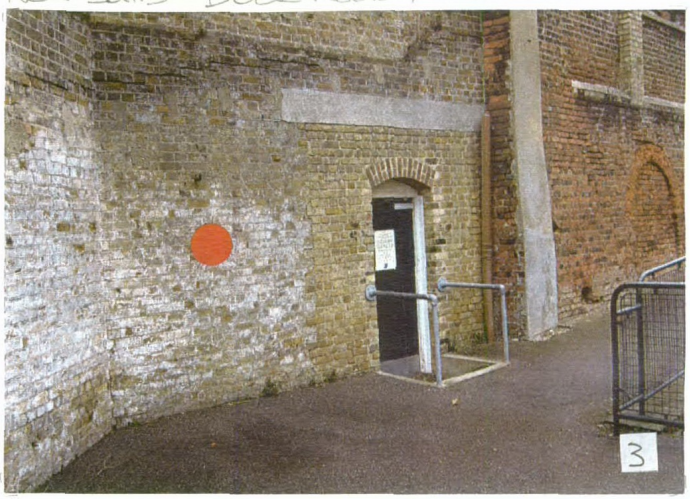
Chatham Library, Chatham

Boards 1 & 2 post mounted

New Steps - Dock Road, Chatham



Board 3 wall mounted

Brompton Hill, Brompton

Board 4 wall mounted

Amherst Redoubt, Brompton

Board 5 post mounted

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Garrison Tennis Courts, Brompton

Board 6 post mounted

Sally Port, Brompton

Board 7 post mounted
(location to be confirmed.)

Key [1] - Trail Board No

● - Proposed location

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Proposed Chatham Defence Lines Heritage Trail
Trail Board Location Views
Sheet 2 of 5 11/07

Prince Arthur Road, Brompton

Board 8 post mounted

Prince Arthur Road, Gillingham

Board 9 post mounted

Black Lion LC, Mill Road, Gillingham

Board 10 post mounted

Great Lines, near Malborough Rd, Gillingham

Board 11 post mounted

Great Lines, footpath, RN Memorial Chatham.

Board 12 post mounted

Dock Road, Chatham

Board 13 post or wall mounted

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Key 1 - Trail Board No

● - Proposed location

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Proposed Chatham Defence Lines Heritage Trail
Trail Board Location Views
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Fort Amherst, Khartoum Rd, Chatham

Board 14 wall mounted

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Key 14 - Trail Board No
● - Proposed location

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Proposed Chatham Defence Lines Heritage Trail
Trail Board Location Views
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Invasion Defence 1940

Invasion Defences 1940

With the onset of the Second World War, the old Napoleonic defences of the Chatham Lines were quickly brought back into use during the first months of the war as improvised anti aircraft positions. However after the Dunkirk evacuation, there was a serious risk of invasion by the German Army. The former Napoleonic defences were quickly incorporated into the local defense plans. They in effect formed an inner perimeter protecting the Dockyard and military barracks, in much the same way as the fortifications had done more than a centaury before. The old dry ditches were considered as ideal anti tank obstacles'. Where there were gaps in the old defences, concrete anti tank obstacles" were constructed, known as "dragons teeth", some surviving examples of these can be seen on the Lower Lines off Medway Road where the defences were brought forward to protect the Naval Nore Command Headquarters constructed under the glacis of the fortifications in 1937. Entrances and roads through the lines were protected with large concrete blocks that could have steel girders dropped between them to close off in an emergency. There is a single surviving example of one of these blocks in the nearby Couvre Port entrance gateway, located a little to the North further along the trail.

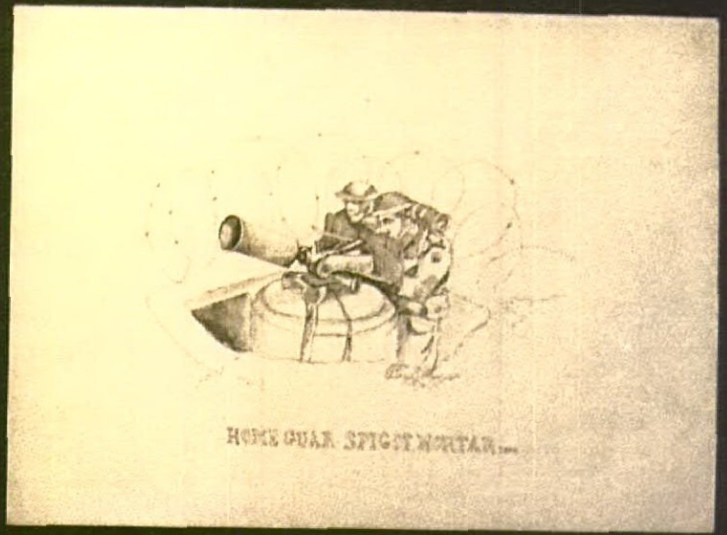
To protect the anti tank obstacle concrete gun emplacements or "pill boxes" were constructed, these were armed with salvaged guns from First World War tanks, and a crew of five men would have operated them. A good example of one these "Type 28 pillboxes" with gun emplacements can be seen at the Sally Port.

Other areas were defended with a weapon known as the Spigot Mortar, specially designed for use by the Home Guard. An example of the concrete emplacement for one is located nearby. The Spigot Mortar or "Blacker Bombard", as it was also known could propel a 20 lb anti tank mortar bomb up to 200 yards; it was operated by an NCO and four men. The Mortar was mounted on the stainless steel pin on the concrete pedestal, this enabled it to be traversed and stabilised. Ammunition was placed in the concrete recess around the sides of the lined pit. The weapon could also be fired without the use of the pedestal as a semi mobile weapon if required. There was also an extensive network of trenches and weapons pits built into the ramparts of the fortifications, traces of these are still visible today. Areas of the fortifications were also protected with live anti tank minefields at points where it was felt possible for tanks to break through. Anti aircraft guns were also mounted at various points which could in an emergency be used against tanks and infantry.

The defences in the event of invasion were to be manned by the local Home Guard units, 12th Chatham, 13th Rochester and 31st Dockyard battalions of the Kent Home Guard, a people's army of boys as young and men as old for the regular army. Hastily raised in May 1940 when the fall of France seemed inevitable and invasion of Britain likely. At first they had no uniform and few weapons. However by September 1940 they resembled a fighting force and by the time of their eventual disbandment in September 1944, were well armed and equipped. For the defence of Chatham the Home Guard were supported by regular soldiers based locally, plus Royal Marines and Sailors from the nearby Marine barracks and HMS Pembroke. The defence of the Medway Towns in the event of invasion was to be controlled from an emergency Military Head Quarters located in the tunnels at Fort Amherst. A surviving copy of "The Garrison Plan to Defeat Invasion," dated 1941 and marked "Secret" can be found in the Medway Local Study Centre at Strood. This unique document lists of the defences in the Medway Towns and who would have manned them.

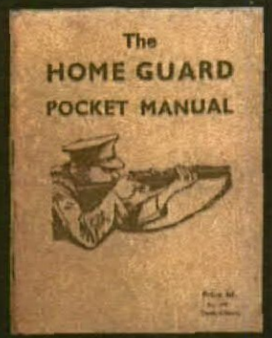
Anti Invasion exercises were held on a regular basis throughout 1940 and 1941 until the threat had receded after the German invasion of [illegible]

Home Guard and Army
Joint Anti-Invasion Exercise
Gillingham early 1941



Bren gun, anti aircraft position on Prince Williams
Battery, Fort Amherst. Manned by
Royal Engineers winter 1940

Gravesend Anti Tank Blocks
Rochester Bridge 1940



HOME GUARD

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CHATHAM DEFENCE LINES HERITAGE TRAIL

Royal Marines at Chatham

The Royal Marines at Chatham.

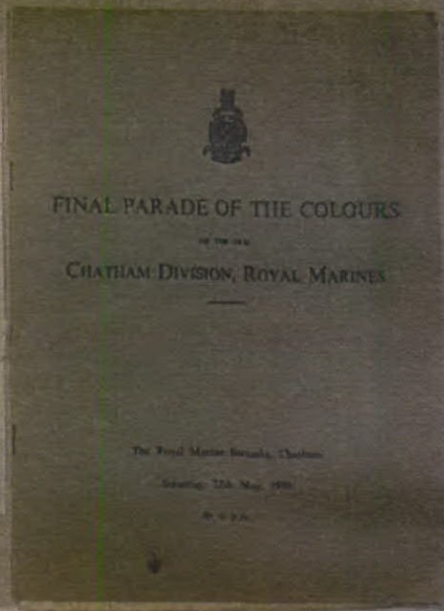
Near this site until their demolition in 1960 stood the Chatham Royal Marine barracks. The barracks were built between 1777 and 1784 and housed the Chatham Division, known as the "First and Grand division" of the Royal Marine Corps (The Royal title was granted by George III in 1802).

The Royal marines were effectually soldiers under the command of Admiralty fulfilling a number of roles during the 18th and early 19th centuries. These included guard and sentry duties on board Royal Navy warships, maintaining discipline and enforcement of regulations. A First rate ship such as HMS Victory would have had a marine detachment of 170 officers and men. Within the Chatham Naval port the Marines perfumed guard duties and ensuring good order among sailors on shore and trying to prevent men deserting. Other duties afloat included manning guns, taking part in boarding parties and assisting in the recovery of captured warships. The Marines also provided garrisons in foreign stations and ports, with the Marines plying a pivotal part in the great siege of Gibraltar from 1779-83.

During the 19th centaury the Royal Marines were divided into light infantry and artillery companies, these separate braches remained until post WWI economies forced a merger in 1923. A Royal marine training gun battery stood for many years in Brompton in the area now known as Barrack Hill, for marines to train for their on board gunnery role which continued into and beyond WWII. On an adjacent site was Melville barracks (now a housing estate of the same name), these barracks were original built as a naval hospital in 1828, but with the opening of the new naval hospital (Now Medway Maritime Hospital) were converted into marine barracks in 1906 as the size of the Royal marines continued to expand.

The barrack complex extended along dock road which it fronted from St Mary's church to the boundary with the dockyard, with the area now occupied with housing containing the married officer's quarters and the Royal marine theater known as "The Globe". The main barrack block was to the west of the site, a tall imposing structure which backed onto the Naval Gun Wharf occupying a long narrow strip of land between the barracks and river Medway. Almost the entire remaining garrison of 200 men from Chatham was rallied on a "General assembly" on the evening of 11th may 1940 to go to the Hook of Holland to fight a rear guard action to facilitate the escape of the Dutch royal family to England.

With the changing role of the Royal Marines to commandos during WWII, Chatham was no longer regarded as suitable for the training of the Marines and the decision was made to close the Chatham barracks, with a closing ceremony taking place 27th may 1950. The pay and records office of the Corps remained at Chatham at Barrack hill for a number of years before also closing. The barracks were sold off in the early 1950's and were used for some years as a paper store before being demolished, not being considered worthy of preservation at the time due to dry rot. The site was bought by Lloyds of London for their administrative head quarters in the early 1970's. With the relocation of Lloyds the building was acquired by Medway Council in 2007.



Private, Royal Marines 1815

Royal Marines Evelyn 1830

Chatham Defence Lines Trail

RM Barracks Main Gate

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